



How U.S. governments for two decades squelched Indochina peace efforts

By ERIK BERT

With each escalation of the Vietnam war the White House made additional efforts to strangle the anguished cries for peace that had been uttered by the people of Indochina.

This is revealed in brutal detail in the New York Times publication of the secret Defense Department history of the Vietnam war.

The stage was set by John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, in the mid-1950s. He ruptured the Geneva accords of 1954 which had ended the French colonialist war in Indochina by ordering U.S. military personnel into South Vietnam in the guise of "advisers."

Only part of the no-negotiation, no-peace efforts are contained in the documents made public. Part of the story still lies buried in the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson private files and libraries. Part was never committed to writing.

On Dec. 21, 1963, Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, warned President Johnson, after a trip to South Vietnam a few days earlier, that the "situation is very disturbing."

"Current trends," he said, "unless reversed in the next 2-3 months will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state."

McNamara said that "Viet Cong progress has been very great during the period since the coup," that is, since President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated, probably at U.S. instigation.

"The Viet Cong now control very high proportions of the people in certain key provinces, particularly those directly south and west of Saigon," he said. The picture was "gloomy," he added.

Three months later, on March 16, 1964, McNamara advised Johnson that escalation of the war would involve "the problem of dealing with the pressures for premature... negotiations."

Rebuffing the pressures for negotiation was part of the preparation for the Gulf of Tonkin invasion which opened the door to the bombing of North Vietnam.

On Aug. 11, 1964, a week after Tonkin Gulf, William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Eastern Affairs, set down, in a memorandum, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," an "essential" element of U.S. policy:

"We must continue to oppose any Vietnam conference, and must play the prospect of a Laos conference very carefully." Negotiation should be undertaken only with "continued military pressure" to "achieve our objectives," he said.

Negotiations should be considered only as an accompaniment of military victory. That was the line.

Admiral Grant Sharp, commander of Pacific forces, in a cablegram to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Aug. 17, 1964, said:

"A conference to include Vietnam, before we have overcome the insurgency would... represent a defeat for the United States."

Bundy outlined, in his Aug. 11, 1964 memorandum, the military escalation to be undertaken between the following September and December.

During this escalation Bundy said, "We should continue absolutely opposed to any (peace) conference."

A major propaganda weapon in the war was the so-called "domino" theory which held that if the U.S. did not conquer in South Vietnam, it would suffer 'defeat' throughout the world.

Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum to Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary, on Jan. 22, 1964, listed the "dominos": Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand; "Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, and the Republic of the Philippines;" and Africa and Latin America.

When McNamara on March 16, passed the "dominos" on to President Johnson, he added Australia and New Zealand and Japan as also threatened in case the U.S. failed to conquer.

On the following day the National Security Action Memorandum expanded by McNamara:

The "domino" doctrine was a fraud.

President Johnson knew it. Johnson knew it because he had checked with the Central Intelligence Agency and the CIA said it was not valid.

In June 1964, Johnson asked the CIA:

"Would the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control?"

The CIA replied on June 9:

"With the possible exception of Cambodia it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to Communism as the result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of Communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time--time in which the total situation might change in any number of ways unfavorable to the Communist cause."

(The CIA spoke prophetically, in one respect. In 1965-66, one-half million Indonesians were slaughtered in an "anti-Communist" crusade.)

Neil Sheehan, New York Times reporter, in an analytical article accompanying the first exposure of the secret documents, said:

The Defense Department "study shows that the President and his senior officials were not inclined to adjust policy along the lines of this (CIA) analysis challenging the domino theory."

The "domino" theory was false, the CIA had told the President, in response to his request. He decided to disregard the answer and to intensify the war.

As Hedrick Smith, another New York Times reporter wrote, the "rationale for policy, the domino theory—that is if South Vietnam fell, other countries would inevitably follow—was repeated in endless variations for nearly two decades."

The Administrations followed a single imperialist policy, the 'domino' theory served all of them.

In his memorandum to Johnson, McNamara said that South Vietnam occupied a "pivotal position... in our world."

STATINTL

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U.S. Rejected First Viet-Pullout Advice

Key Rusk Aide Spurned by Top Kennedy Council

BY STUART H. LOORY

Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—Advised for the first time that the United States faced a can't-win situation in the Vietnam war, President John F. Kennedy's National Security Council in August, 1963, rejected the recommendation of a State Department expert on Vietnam to pull out honorably, the Pentagon's top-secret history of the war shows.

Instead, Secretary of State Dean Rusk put down such talk from one of his subordinates as "speculative," saying:

"It would be far better for us to start on the firm basis of two things—that we will not pull out of Vietnam until the war is won, and that we will not run a coup."

Overruled Expert Named

The expert overruled by Rusk was Paul M. Kattenburg, then head of the State Department's Vietnam Working Group, who had dealt with President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam for 10 years. Then-Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, among other important officials, backed Rusk's view, the account says.

The report on the session, held at the State Department and chaired by Rusk in President Kennedy's absence, is contained in a memorandum written by Marine Maj. Gen. Victor C. Krulak, then the Pentagon's top expert on counterinsurgency.

Krulak's memorandum is included in previously unpublished sections of the report that The Times has obtained. The sections are from the same Pentagon study that were the subject of previous stories in the New York Times, Washington Post and Boston Globe. It was prepared by a team of Pentagon analysts under a directive from McNamara in 1963. The analysts had access to documents only on file in the Defense Department. The analysts did not have access to the complete files at the White House or State Department.

The meeting Krulak describes was called as a "where-do-we-go-from-here" session after a group of Saigon generals failed to bring off a coup against the increasingly unpopular regime headed by Diem.

The meeting was a key session in the period from May to November, 1963, during which non-Communist opposition to the Diem regime grew rapidly and eventually boiled over into the overthrow of Diem and the assassination of him and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu on Nov. 2.

During the National Security Council session, Kattenburg advanced the suggestion that, in Krulak's words, "At this juncture it would be better for us to make the decision to get out honorably."

The complete text of Krulak's report on Kattenburg's presentation said:

"Mr. Kattenburg stated that as recently as last Thursday it was the belief of Ambassador (Henry Cabot) Lodge (Jr.) that, if we undertake to live with this repressive regime, with its bayonets at every street corner and its transparent negotiations with puppet

bonzes (Buddhist monks) we are going to be thrown out of the country in six months.

Would Not Separate

"He stated that at this juncture it would be better for us to make the decision to get out honorably. He went on to say that, having been acquainted with Diem for 10 years, he was deeply disappointed in him, saying that he will not separate from his brother. It was Kattenburg's view that Diem will get little support from the military and, as time goes on, he will get less and less support and the country will go steadily downhill.

"Gen. (Maxwell D.) Taylor (then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) asked what Kattenburg meant when he said that we would be forced out of Vietnam within six months. Kattenburg replied that in from six months to a year, as people see we are losing the war, they will gradually go to the other side and we will be obliged to leave.

Rusk dismissed the view and McNamara agreed. Rusk then went on to say there was "good proof," in Krulak's term, that the war was being won. Lyndon Johnson agreed, saying that "from both a practical and a political viewpoint, it would be a disaster to pull out; that we should stop playing cops and robbers and get back to talking straight to the GVN (Saigon government) and that we should once again go about winning the war."

Sharply Critical

The Pentagon report on the meeting was sharply critical of the deliberations. It spoke of the officials' "rambling inability to focus the problem, indeed to reach common agreement on the nature of the problem."

The report continues:

"More importantly, however, the meeting is the first recorded occasion

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Going Mad With Contingency Plans

So much has been said about contingency plans during the scattered publications of

the Pentagon Papers on Vietnam that it has been necessary to define a contingency. It is an unforeseen occurrence or,



Sumner

quoting Webster's still, something liable to happen as an adjunct to something else.

We can also add to the definition, I think: We can define a contingency as a self-fulfilling plan of action; if you have enough contingencies lying about you can pick one out and use it and though you intended to use it you can simply state that you had to be ready for anything.

For examples of simple contingency plans:

I have no doubt there are plans for Russia to destroy us and for us to destroy Russia. Probably — sticking at home — we have plans to invade Canada and Mexico, and it would probably be but a matter of simple adjustment to adjust our computers and gyros to hit London or Berlin along with the men's room at the Kremlin. This last was always Barry Goldwater's favorite target; it always seemed particularly heartless — I mean, for goodness sake is there no decency?

ANYWAY, as one can see, if you have enough contingent plans and speculations

By William Sumner

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lying about it can lead to paranoia. The only one I know who can play this game to the hilt without going mad is Dr. Herman Kahn, who plays nuclear if-manship in an entertaining way that demonstrates, finally — although his many liberal critics never quite catch on — the impossibility of war.

Of course he would argue that point. War is entirely possible, and war of many degrees. His most obvious comforting assertion is that the worst wouldn't necessarily destroy humankind. What he does is speculate on various alternatives and possibilities, viz, would we really start a nuclear war to save West Berlin or even Germany? I would hope not, but then the Russians obviously don't know the answer either and are probably not interested in finding it any longer.

You can see how these contingency plans have affected us in our dealings with Southeast Asia. First of all, President Kennedy found there was no real infantry available for "brush-fire" action. John Foster Dulles kept threatening everyone with nuclear weapons that no one intended to use, but you give a guy some real soldiers, such as the Green Berets, and you have a force available for a contingency. And so JFK was given his force. And every option seemed to call for more force.

READING further into the Times-Post-Globe-and-Sun-Times reports one can see that President Johnson had several contingency plans to deal with, most of them bad. The only heroes to emerge so far are former Undersecretary George Ball and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of

Much of the stuff in the Pentagon expose is opinionated, reflecting the changed viewpoints of the compilers and, perhaps, the superhawk turned dove who ordered the study in 1967, Robert McNamara. But as you read, slowly, through the unedited documents you reach the impression, finally, that there are true contingency plans and that there are also occurrences which are clearly foreseen, occurrences which can be defined as contingencies only in a very loose sense, like the creation of police brutality following the creation of a riot.

I spoke of paranoia. It must be unnerving for a human to be so highly placed as the President. Regard ordinary humans and plots real and imagined. I would say that when Ordinary Human begins making contingency plans A through Z, one of them calling for dumping his neighbor's garbage cans and another the throwing of cherry bombs into this basement — this to see how he reacts — he may be looking for an honorable settlement of a boundary or he may simply be going mad.

Ray Cromley / Facts ignored

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A MOST worrisome aspect of the Pentagon Vietnam papers is their evidence on how frequently high officials of the government have ignored facts presented by their own professional subordinates, whether these professionals were in the Pentagon, the State Department or the Central Intelligence Agency.

Sometimes the unpleasant or "non-conforming" data was screened out by White House assistants, sometimes by the President.

The Vietnam papers don't of course, tell the whole story.

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I HAVE knowledge of one reasonably high official with access to President Johnson and with some considerable technical skill at analyzing military action reports who, in a face-to-face session, warned the President that the Tonkin Gulf messages from the officers in that affair were too vague and inconclusive, and that they should be treated with extreme caution.

President Johnson looked up and said sharp-

ly: When your advice is wanted you will be asked for it. Good day.

There followed shortly after a transfer to a post out of the direct line of action.

Those who said what pleased the President were moved in closer to his ear.

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BUT there are other examples from one administration and another.

The evidence of the technicians was largely ignored in the Bay of Pigs invasion. They were, in the main, overruled by men with little or no experience in this type of operation.

The technical evidence of the Defense Department's own top experts in guerrilla strategy and tactics was largely passed over in planning and fighting the Vietnam war. Search and destroy sweeps, aerial bombings of the type routinely ordered, the use of large numbers of conventional troops — all were anathema to those high officials and officers most experienced in guerrilla operations.

More recently, the Pentagon's own official research study on the lessons learned from the Vietnam war to be applied in any future similar situation has been put on the shelf. It hasn't been contradicted; it has been ignored.